

## The Willow Run Rosies at Oak Ridge Secret City Festival – part 2

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on July 25, 2016)

Here is Alison Beatty's second installment of her excellent report on the visit she and 19 other Willow Run Rosies made to Oak Ridge to participate in the 2016 Oak Ridge Secret City Festival. If you read her report last week on the first day of their visit to the festival, you know you are in for another treat as she describes their experiences on the second day of the Secret City Festival.

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The second day was as much fun as the first! We arrived at the American Museum of Science and Energy for the Graphite Reactor tour. We also had enough time to swing through the museum and take pictures in front of the flat top house. (This Flat Top house was the home of Bob Presley and his widow, Louise Presley makes sure to be there during the Secret City Festival's to share her pride of that history. – Ray)

Willow Run is famous for building a four-engine B-24 Liberator Bomber every hour. So, we were very impressed to learn that some of the prefabricated houses could be assembled in half an hour.

Then we were off to see the Graphite Reactor. Our guide, Benny Hauser, has enough knowledge about the Graphite Reactor to write a book!

It was amazing to literally stand at this spot where history was made and learn about how uranium was changed into plutonium. (When visitors experience the authenticity of actually being in these historical settings, they leave with a much deeper appreciation for our heritage than can be obtained by presentations, photographs, or videos. The real thing is vitally important to the effective education of the public regarding the awesome technological advances that make up the Manhattan Project history – Ray)

What I find most impressive is how Oak Ridge wasn't certain which method of uranium enrichment would be the most successful, so instead of guessing they just decided to build all three simultaneously. It was staggering to be so up close and personal to this moment in history. (Well said! See folks, when someone comes to visit us, what we all too often take for granted is "staggering" to them! – Ray)

For lunch we actually changed our original plans and headed to The Other One, because locals kept telling us to check it out. And they were right!! It was delicious, cheap, and fast. My goodness they have a lot of types of sandwiches! I wish I could have tried them all.

And it was close enough to be within walking distance to the Festival, where we proceeded after eating. (Walking distance is also a great asset we have but one we may also take for granted as often we drive our cars a single block when walking might have been a better choice...- Ray)

That afternoon the Rosies gave a short performance in the History Exhibit. We sang "The Secret City Ditty," "The Rosie The Riveter Song," and "God Bless America."

Then we were treated to the most exciting event of the weekend: meeting some real live Calutron Girls! We listened in rapt attention as they told us stories of life in Oak Ridge when it was still secret from the world, and we memorized their advice: "always enjoy life and be young at heart." We will never forget that special afternoon!

(Special thanks to Ruth Huddleston and Peggy Stuart – real live Calutron "cubicle operators" that we affectionately have labeled "Calutron Girls" thanks to Steve Stow, retired Director of the American Museum of Science and Energy, who coined the phrase in 2004 when Gladys Owens recognized herself in the famous Ed Westcott photograph of the young girls right out of high school sitting on stools in front of their Calutron cubicles. Thanks also to Virginia Coleman, who was a chemist at Y-12 during the Manhattan Project and who can also add a great story about Clarence Lawson and how he impressed his superiors with the production at Y-12. And finally thanks to Jane Greer Puckett's daughter, Beverly who joined in the event and added interesting facts from her mother's experiences at Y-12 – Ray)

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There were two more big treats in store for the Rosies. The first was dinner at Dean's Restaurant & Bakery. I started out with a six-way tie between each of the cakes I wanted for dessert. I weighed my options carefully over a dinner of pork loin and some of the best cornbread I have ever eaten. I finally narrowed it down to the caramel cake, and after one bite I knew I had made the right decision! We will definitely be coming back if we have the chance. (That's a promise, Alison...we will hold you to it next year! – Ray)

The final surprise for the Rosies was that we got to meet some of the members of Grand Funk Railroad behind the stage! GFR has a special place in our hearts because they are from Michigan, just like us. The Secret City Festival is just the right size to make it possible to cross paths like this - large enough to attract good bands and small enough for you to rub elbows with them before the show. We had a blast inviting everyone to "Do the Locomotion" with us during the concert!

On Sunday morning our trip came to an end and we began the long drive back to Michigan, bubbling over with enthusiasm for all that we have seen and done. (And we are still basking in our good fortune that you chose to come our way! – Ray)

We could have gone anywhere for our First Annual Rosie Road Trip. What makes Oak Ridge unique, and why we decided to visit, is its past and its future, its singular concoction of cutting edge sophistication and country charm, politics and science, war and peace, hope and optimism.

It's a city that has successfully learned how to celebrate and leverage what makes it unique, where opposites come together to produce something greater than the sum of their parts. We came for the history and we stayed for the friendship, food, and fun! (Remember, one of the Rosies had never been to Tennessee and several of them expressed their amazement at their first experience of real southern hospitality! We are good at that, you know! Again, something we may all too often take for granted. It is part and parcel of the experience we provide to our visitors...take pride in our southern heritage and natural tendency to be helpful and cordial to all visitors. – Ray)

There are so many things we didn't get a chance to see and do (watch the reenactment, visit the other museums, eat ice cream at Razzleberry's, visit the craft show, etc. etc.) that I can only hope we will be back next year. (We are looking forward to more interaction and more visits and, who knows, maybe some of us will visit you in Michigan! - Ray)

By that time, will there be any way to get pencils made with reactor graphite in the AMSE gift shop? (Good question...I doubt it. We are sure not going to remove any of the graphite from the National Historical Landmark Monument that is our Graphite Reactor!. – Ray)

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There you have the second installment of a really good and well written trip report! I am so pleased that when I asked Alison to write for this Historically Speaking series that she readily accepted. I know you have enjoyed it as much as I have. Thank you Alison and maybe, just maybe, we can do the same thing next year!

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Virginia Coleman, Ruth Huddleston and Peggy Stuart – Calutron Girls wearing gift scarfs from the Rosies!





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Rosie the Riveter group strikes their famous pose with the Calutron Girls



Rosies place their pins on the Calutron Girls making them honorary Rosie the Riveters